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DISCOURSE

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AS PASTOR OVER THE

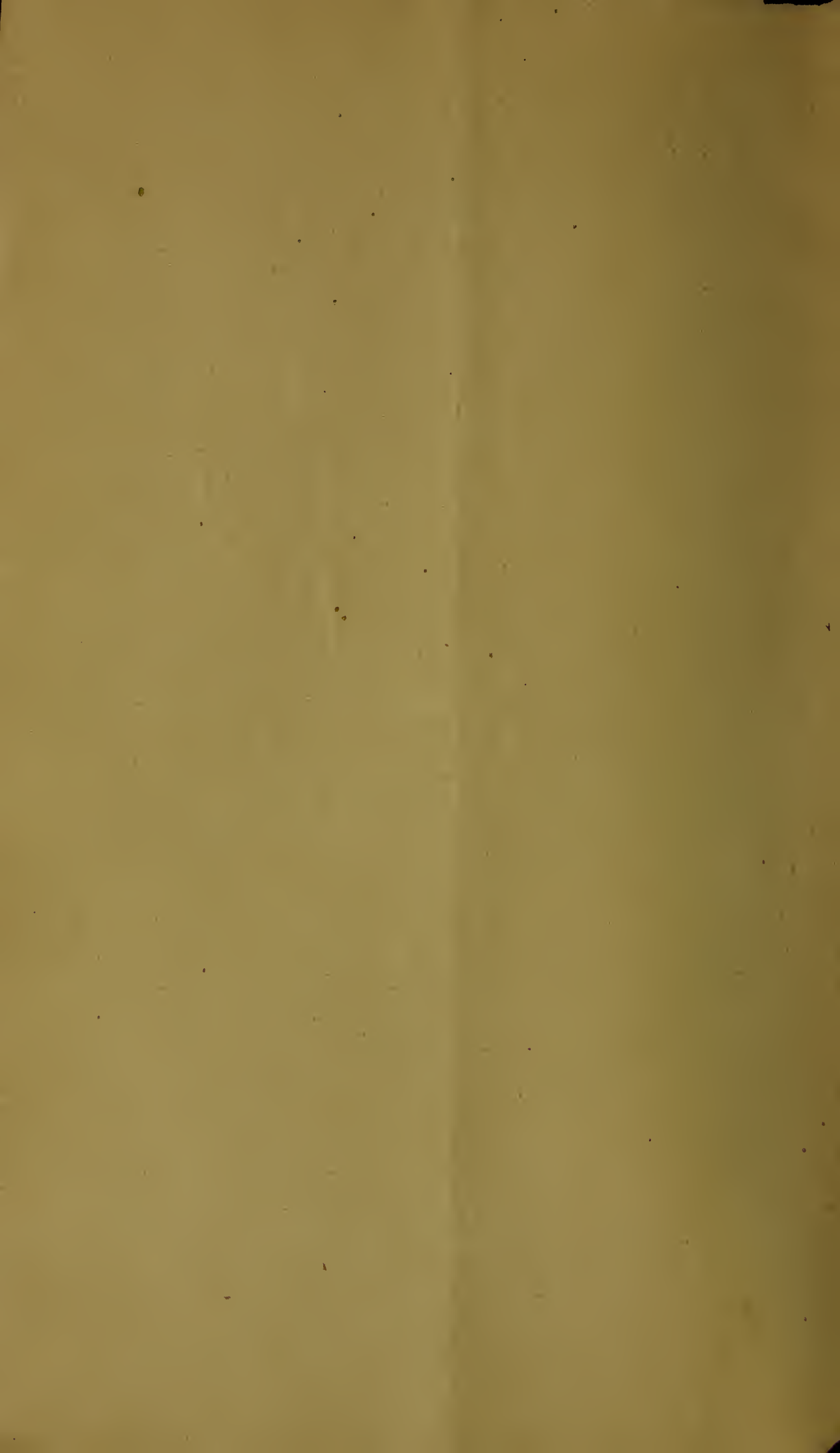
First Congregational Church and Society

IN NEW BEDFORD DEC. 28 1859

BY

WILLIAM H. FURNESS

MINISTER OF THE FIRST UNITARIAN CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
IN PHILADELPHIA



CHRISTIANITY A SPIRIT

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DISCOURSE

GALAT. IV. 6.

“GOD HATH SENT FORTH THE SPIRIT OF HIS SON INTO YOUR HEARTS.”

MY FRIENDS, I am at a loss to know how a more complete account can be given in a few words of the Religion of the New Testament than we have here. In this brief sentence we have a statement of the source and the substance of the whole matter. It is from God; God sends it into the hearts of men. And it is a spirit, the spirit of a Son; in other words, a Filial Spirit breathed into men by God.

I ask your attention to this representation of the Religion of Jesus. It is interesting and important on so many accounts; at the first view, because it differs entirely from the popular definitions of Christianity that are attempted. Men are forever trying to represent it as a theology. From a very early age of our era, the study has been to define it as a system, not as a life or soul of humanity, but as

a body of divinity, so called, a form of worship, of words, or of thought. It is held to be the desideratum, the thing to be accomplished some day or other, when the millenium begins, I suppose:—the embodiment of the Christian Religion in certain definite intellectual apprehensions of God and of man, in a sound logical form, which shall satisfy every body and put an end to all controversy. The consequence of this expectation leading to never-ceasing attempts in this direction, is, that, as men differ constitutionally in their ways of thinking and their modes of expression there is an endless diversity in the representations of our Religion which are made and which gain currency. The most opposite accounts of it are put forth, contradiction arises of necessity, and contradiction generates, first coldness, and then heat; and from heat comes bigotry and violence and all the bitter shame and misery of persecution. And so Religion, the Christian Religion, which is the most abundant spring of mutual confidence and perfect freedom ever opened on earth, is to this day, the occasion of divisions and of distrust and suspicion without end.

Now, although all this, all circumstances considered, happens very naturally, it is without the slightest ground of reason or authority in Christianity itself. Most assuredly, if the Religion of Jesus

of Nazareth could have been defined after this logical fashion, the work would have been entrusted to no hands but his. He would himself have done it; but he never did it, nor was it ever intended to be so defined. It cannot be; and a blessed day it will be when all attempts of this sort are given up once for all and forever, and a full end comes to the endeavor to convert Religion as Jesus taught it into a theology. No words, no series of propositions, however impregnable, can convey any idea of it. It is no more a form of thought, than it is a form of worship. It is a life, an essence indefinable. You can no more put it in words than you can put light into a vessel and keep it there.

But though it cannot be defined and is as unsearchable by the understanding as God himself, still it may in a certain very thorough sense be known; nothing in the world more intimately. The heart, the heart, may distinguish it and be profoundly sensible of it. You may thus possess it and as fully as you possess your own soul; your imagination may be all in a glow through its inspiration; your whole being throb and expand with its life. Indeed, paradoxical as it may seem, you have it in its perfection, you know it best, when you know it not, when you are as little conscious of it as of your limbs or your breath, when your right hand is doing

its work and your left hand has not the slightest suspicion of it, and the right hand itself is hardly aware of it.

I wish we might perceive this clearly now and always, that Religion, in the Christian sense of it, is not a form of thought capable of verbal expression. It is a spirit; and when I call it a spirit, I use the word in its popular signification as a disposition, or habitual temper, or pervading tone of feeling. And I say that Christianity is a filial spirit, the spirit of a Son, illustrated most impressively in the life of him who did all the great things he was moved to do as so many filial offices, and as himself standing to the Highest in the relation of a Son; and all who desire to know what Christianity is, can obtain the desired knowledge, only through the same spirit, through an active sympathy with the Son as a Son.

I wish that we might see that this is so, because then we might hope that an end would come to these miserable divisions that are constantly coming up from the false importance attached to names and words, or opinions, thoughts, which are hardly anything more than words, logical puzzles or scare-crows. It is most pitiable,—the extent to which men graduate their confidence in one another by nominal or speculative standards. It is not only the

ignorant that exhibit this narrowness. The most learned, men whose minds are filled with whole libraries of knowledge, betray the same weakness and are shy of those who, as cultivated as themselves or more so, do not stand some nominal test.

Liabile as we are to be thus influenced in our estimation of others and to have the free flow of that genial human sympathy, which makes the whole world kin, choked and impeded by forms of thought and words, the merest rubbish in comparison, we must be sadly vitiated by these verbal divisions, if we do not instinctively welcome such an understanding of what Religion is, as will deliver us forever from this experience, and set us hand in hand in a free large place, high above the noxious influence of theological distinctions. And this it is that will render us this valuable service, namely, to consider well that Religion is not any formal conclusion of the intellect to be stated in words, but a spirit.

Such being its nature, it is easy to perceive that it may be wholly independent of the various modes of religious thought and speech which men use. It not only may be so, it is so, as observation abundantly attests. Religion, thus regarded, is continually found in connection with every variety of opinion and of no-opinion. It blossoms out in commanding beauty, like the gorgeous Cactus flower, from the

most unsightly theological and philosophical stems. There is no sect, in or out of Christendom, that has not contributed its share to the glorious clouds of witnesses that encompass and consecrate this life of ours. How diverse the creeds are that men profess you all know. It is impossible for the imagination to conceive of statements more abhorrent to what we consider right reason and feeling than many which have been maintained by individuals and large bodies of men. While some assert there is no God, and deny his personality, others represent Him as the bloodthirsty enemy of the human race. Such monstrosities have been conceived as this, for instance, that if God were to command men to hate Him, the hatred of God would be the duty of man. The most hideous idols of Heathenism do but imperfectly represent the opinions which have been affirmed concerning the Highest.

But not only is there an endless diversity of thought among men, the greatest changes, complete revolutions, are constantly taking place in men's thinking, even when their modes of speaking do not change. Much as language changes, thought changes faster. New forms of opinion appear and gain currency, and the heresy of yesterday is orthodoxy to-day, and will turn into heresy again to-morrow. We have a very striking instance of the changes of

human opinion in the case of the question: Are the heavenly bodies inhabited or not? A question which has full as much connection with Religion as many of the questions which we are disputing about in these days. When some hundreds of years ago, it was suggested that the stars are inhabited, the thought was denounced as hostile to Religion. But gradually it got fixed in the general mind; and now when a few years since a learned man published a book designed to show that we have been too hasty in our presumptions, that the stars are probably not inhabited, that our globe is the only world containing moral and intelligent beings,—this idea, once orthodox, the very opposite of the old heresy, is denounced as an impious speculation; and another learned man, in order to controvert it, publishes a work entitled, “More worlds than one, the creed of the philosopher and the hope of the Christian;” as if, by the way, a philosopher could have a creed in reference to a matter of which it is impossible to have positive evidence, and of which a Christian can only entertain a hope! Christianity, rightly considered, not as a form of thought, but as a principle of life, lives through all these diversities and revolutions and is found active and vigorous in association with all.

And not only is this the case, not only may it be

so, not only is it so, if such a thing as the Religion of Jesus is possible, it is impossible that it should have any existence, save under precisely these conditions. For, when we duly consider it, what apprehensions are there to which the finite understanding in its highest state of culture can give a verbal form, in regard to the great invisible Facts of Being, that we do not instinctively feel to fall so far short of the actual truth as to render it hardly worth while to distinguish them from ideas the most palpably crude and false? They may all be thrown in together. They are not worth assorting for any value they have apart from the spirit. "The Highest cannot be expressed in words." O, what a pregnant saying is that! Nothing ever written, outside of the New Testament, has helped me so much as that brief saying. The best notions of the human understanding are but glimmerings of the reality of Truth, as indistinct and formless as the flashes of the Northern lights. The difference between them and the actual truth is, I apprehend, far greater than the difference between them and the ideas of the most barbarous tribes. Indeed, there is such a similarity between all human thoughts, that, if we look closely, we find a resemblance between what we call truth and doctrines that we pronounce most opposite to it. I have never seen an error yet that did not

turn out to be a distortion of what I consider truth. So that there are no human thoughts that are not inadequate.

Religion then, in the Christian sense of it, is something distinct from our thinking, and oftentimes he has the most of it, who has none to speak of. And, I repeat, if our hearts have not been utterly crushed out of us by theological formalities, if they have not been run into verbal moulds till they are perfectly cold and hardened there, we shall take to this pure spiritual view of Religion right gladly, as a new-born babe takes to its mother's milk; and for the reason mainly which I have mentioned: because it will instantly knock off all our theological chains and completely liberate us from the habit of estimating men, not by what they are, not by their spirit, but by what they say or think that they think. Why, a deliverance of this sort is nothing less than salvation, translation from the narrow and gloomy prison-houses of our selfish pride into a bright and boundless heaven of brotherhood and liberty.

There are some people who seem to take to this idea of Religion instinctively. They are liberal from temperament, or from sheer indifference. With these exceptions, however, there is a great deal of illiberality in the general mind, a constant and wide

tendency, either to magnify false distinctions already existing, or to draw new lines of division between men; and no amount of intellectual culture avails to counteract it. Let a man express a single new opinion, or let fall a word that does not drop at once into place with the established phraseology, theological or philosophical, of the day, (as erring human men, of the highest education, are liable to do,) then, no matter how sound his spirit is, or how impressively manifested, he is instantly a marked man, to be looked at askance, and more or less directly denounced. This narrowness we are so constantly falling into, that, I repeat, it must be a great relief to every man who has in him a heart vitally united to all human hearts, to see clearly as we may that there is a broad ground of principle on which we may take our stand in defence of the largest freedom of thought as perfectly consistent with unreserved spiritual union and mutual confidence.

A popular impression is that where there is no theology there is no religion, that a man can have no religion unless he can define it. One great reason why the orthodox sects look with such persistent distrust upon what is called liberal Christianity, is that its theology is so indistinct. Hence it is inferred that it is only thinly veiled irreligion. Now, my friends, that this fault is found with our

Religion, so far from being an objection to it, is greatly to its credit. I, for one, do most earnestly and respectfully wish that there were a greater reason than there is for this objection, and that, little as our theology is, we had less, and so much less that there should not be the slightest theological necessity for excluding from our communion, persons whom we know and regard with admiration and respect. It is true, the sentence of exclusion that we pass is not garnished with any Athanasian imprecations. While our friends are denied to be fellow-Christians, the extreme admission is made that they may be something more and better than Christians, an admission which I cannot concur in making, because I cannot concede that there can be anything better than a Christian, in the true meaning of that title. It is no word or forms,—it is the spirit that gives that name its significance, listening not to the cry of Lord! Lord! but welcoming into cordial and vital communion the venerable Parsee, for example, who recently died in the far East, after a life of munificent humanity, and whom Christian Princes delighted to honor, recognizing the benevolent doer of the Divine Will, as an accepted child of God, a beloved brother of Christ and of all men.

So far as our idea of Religion, my brothers, corresponds with the Christianity of Christ himself, it

is a life essentially as inscrutable as the vital power of the human body, and we may know it, in the only way in which it can be known, only by its effects, its fruits, and these again we can distinguish only as they exist, and to the degree in which they exist in ourselves. Not a surmise even, of its truth and exquisite beauty and ineffable peace can be had in any other way.

Such being the nature of the Christian Religion, it becomes important to consider that it is communicable, not by artificial, but by natural means, in other words, signifying the same thing, by divine methods, not by human. This is so plain that it would seem scarcely necessary to state it. If a plant is to be propagated, the seeds of the plant must be sown ; no botanical description of it, however exact, though buried in the richest mould that the most scientific gardener can prepare and kept carefully under glass, and watered every morning and evening, nay, no invention that the wit of man can manufacture will serve the office of the seed ; not a leaf will spring or dream of springing. And yet this mode of propagation, insane and absurd as it is, every age from the first of the Christian era, has tried its hand at, in reference to that heavenly plant sown by God in the divine heart of Jesus, which has ravished the world with its beauty

and its fragrance. To cause that plant to germinate in other hearts, the study has been and is, to effect it through a theological medium. There must be some mode of thought, some system of opinion devised, under the name of a creed or list of abstract articles, written or unwritten. And this has been cherished as the seminal principal of Religion. So men have invented a righteousness of their own, an artificial Religion which would not have a spark of life in it, but that the Divine life steals in everywhere, neutralizing in some degree what is evil, and fostering what is good; a religion of profession and form, profoundly self-conscious, always knowing when and how it is religious, and not clothed with humility in consequence; a religion, which makes a great show, filling the world with the noise of its machinery and working all the time smoothly as oil in harmony with the most outrageous abuses, and the cry of it all is, not reform, but conform; and the Church has built itself on the crushed rights of Humanity, absolving all who would uphold it from the most sacred obligations of Nature, sanctifying iniquity, desecrating justice and mercy, until this whole land, aye, and this whole great Christendon heaves and rocks to and fro with the strife between the monstrous imposition which is sought to be palmed off upon mankind as Christianity, and the imperishable and Heaven-sown

seeds of natural Religion, swelling and germinating and struggling to spring up and blossom and bear their ambrosial fruit in the lives and institutions of men. Such is the sad result of undertaking to propagate Religion artificially, by means of forms, forms of thought and phrases.

We all say, "Go to Christ. That is the way to find Religion. He is the supreme authority." Ah! if we only would go to Christ in the right meaning of those words. But going to Christ, or coming to Christ, whichever the phrase is, is everywhere understood to signify that we must take his words and with them construct some theological formula which shall serve as a conduit through which the vitality of his truth shall be transfused into our being. But his words, studied so, and for such a purpose, apart from him, lose all their life-giving significance, as flowers wither when torn from their parent plant. How true this is, the whole history of the Christian world bears impressive testimony. Men have pored critically, exhausting their sagacity, over every word that Jesus and his immediate friends are recorded to have said or written, but what for? To make out some case to which in one way or another their pride is committed, to establish a system, to authorize some foregone conclusion. And consequently no two of us agree, every one insisting that he has got the

divine, regenerating, sanctifying life in his little cup, which he keeps burnishing, and making clean on the outside, while within is nothing but the poison of intolerance and the froth of self-conceit.

Not so, dear friends, not so did Jesus labor and die to diffuse the divine principle, the eternal life. He did not sow a theology in order to produce Religion. He did not put those who came to him through a course of doctrines, few or many. While there never lived one whose whole being was rounded into so consummate a consistency with itself and all grand and beautiful things, he had no system, no philosophy, no abstractions, no formulas. Nothing could well be more informal than those very teachings of his, which we are so bent upon systematizing. The most marked characteristic of his utterances is that they were suggested and took shape from circumstances,—all occasional. They came straight and glowing from his heart, and were the issues of his personal being, all alive with the life of that, and it was not their logical truth that wrought upon his hearers, enlightening their understandings and so persuading and convincing them. Their logical truth, they very often missed entirely, or fell very far short of apprehending. Indeed, the strict verbal significance of his utterance, mankind, with all their wisdom and learning, are yet far from fathoming.

But the beaming expression of feature, the eye flashing with emotion or glistening with tenderness, the voice ringing with the music of a soul-felt and soul-subduing sincerity,—in a word, the godlike personality expressed by all these tokens,—this it was that went straight to the hearts of his friends, and made those hearts open to him like flowers to the sun and rain and all the genial influences of nature. Thus, in accordance with the divine methods of nature, others were brought into sympathy with him. Thus the divine life streamed forth from him, through his words just as well as his deeds, because they were alive; they were spirit, and it penetrated the hearts of men, and before they were aware of it, his life had entered into them, and he was living in them and they were living in him. Thus they became animated by his spirit, the spirit of Truth, the Holy spirit, which came from the Father through the Son, and, quickening into activity all their powers, led them as Jesus said it would, into the way of all truth.

And here I pray you to observe that the spirit of Christ, which thus attracted others and communicated itself to them, was not merely his spirit. It was the spirit of the Highest, which is breathing at this moment and forever through universal nature. It breathes in us, feebly indeed, but still it is here in

every human being, by virtue of our humanity, of our natural human affections. Yes, buried deep though it may be, and dormant for I know not how long, but still living, like the wheat found in Egyptian tombs, the divine seed of Religion is in us all. And that it is, the Lord Jesus, in whom it sprang up and bloomed in such inexpressible beauty, gives us most touching proof. For, by his profound human sympathy, he penetrated into the human heart, through all its hardness and corruption. He recognized its divine affections, and his teachings, — what are they but the articulate voice of our own nature? He speaks for God in us all.

We must have doctrines, must we? A doctrine of spiritual influence? Here then is a doctrine of the very first quality on this point, a doctrine drawn up out of the very universal heart of humanity. "What man of you," he once exclaimed, "who is a father, who, if his son ask him for bread, will give him a stone, or if he ask a fish will give him a serpent? If ye then, evil as you are, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give his very spirit to those who seek it." Just think of the blessed meaning of these few words, this mere exclamation. Does it not say as plainly as possible that they who desire light and guidance are infinitely more sure of obtaining what

they desire than a child is to receive food from its parents? We might just as well fear that parents will give stones and serpents to their offspring, instead of food, as that he who aims to be guided truly, will fail to be so guided. I declare to you, friends, I cannot conceive of any truth, having the form of a doctrine, more vital to the soul of man than this. Does it not meet and answer our deepest want? And yet, where did it come from? Did Christ bring it to us as a dogma or mystery, which had been brought down to him from the highest heaven, as a truth lying far out of the range of human knowledge and only to be got possession of by the labor of the understanding? Oh no, he reads it to us in our own evil hearts, and so plainly that we are ashamed to have overlooked it.

Again. To the need we all feel of mercy, how touchingly has he spoken in the same way, through our own hearts! The consciousness of sin fills us with painful forebodings, and we would be assured that there will be pity for us, and a way of deliverance from the heavy bondage of evil. Under the sense of our ill deserts, what soothing and hope come to us from the life of Jesus! And what is it that renders his words such messages of love, and his name the synonyme of mercy? Is it that he has revealed to us some vast scheme planned in the

hidden counsels of the Infinite mind for the pardon of human guilt, some scheme, at which nothing in Nature hints, but from which everything in Nature shrinks aghast? Oh no, and again and ten thousand times, No! He startled the world with no such strange suggestions. He pointed to a simple fact in human nature, to a simple chapter of human history, which has been and will be told over and over again in actual life, in the personal experience of thousands of men,—the immortal Parable of the Prodigal Son. That is no fiction, no fantastic creation of a mystical theology, but a real incident, and not an incident happening only once, but, as I say, thousands of times. Shall we ever grow weary of dwelling on it? The son, eager for pleasure, weary of the monotony of home, longs to be abroad, to see the world. He obtains the means of going from the fondness of an indulgent parent. When once away from the eye of his father, he yields to evil solicitations. He dissipates health and wealth in vicious courses. He has indeed wandered into a far country, far from his early innocence. Soon he is reduced to abject want. He is compelled for bread to take the meanest employment. Rioting once in wine and every luxury, he is reduced to hunger for husks that have no nourishment, that swine only can feed upon. In the misery to which his vices have reduced

him, he wakes to his folly. He comes to himself—to his better self. He thinks of the abundance of his father's house. The servants there are far better off than he. He resolves to go home, and tell his father how greatly he has sinned, not with any thought of being re-instated in his old place, as a beloved younger son, but that he may be taken as a hired servant, only that he may earn his bread and live and not die. He executes his resolve, and turns his steps homeward. And now as he approaches the dear scene of his innocent childhood with fear and trembling, conscious of his utter unworthiness, with a host of tender recollections thronging his mind, dreading the revered presence of the parent whose fondness he had so wretchedly abused, although squalid with rags,—the clear bloom and erect form of innocence all lost,—when yet a great way off, the eye of parental love recognizes him, and in an instant his father falls upon his neck and hushes his sobbing confessions with kisses of welcome and forgiveness, calling in the same breath upon the whole household to share in the rejoicing of that unlooked for return. There, there in that parental heart, swelling with the sacred yearnings of natural affection, waiting not for any explanation, but accepting joyfully the simple return of the prodigal as an atonement for the past and a pledge for the future,—there the whole blessed

mystery of the everlasting mercy is laid bare. So manifestly is it there, that Jesus has left us to draw the grand inference for ourselves. There in the human heart, inspired with parental love, let every sinning child of God look and read the gospel of pardon and of peace.

Thus it was, not by any process of indoctrination, not by providing any theological or philosophical conveyance for the spirit, but, let the theology or the philosophy of men be what it might, by going through the electric power of sympathy straight into the heart, that the spirit of the divine Son was breathed into men. That spirit, as I have said, was already there, latent in the very nature of Humanity. And it was stirred into life, not by any information formally imparted to the intellect. Why, not even such rudimental principles as God and Immortality, did Jesus ever affirm. He took them always for granted. They were implied in his whole being, and his friends unconsciously grew in their faith in them through those sacred yearnings of Love and Holiness which he awakened into activity, which are the realizations of God and Immortality, of things invisible and everlasting, infinitely more satisfactory than any reasoning or arguments. In fine, Jesus did not teach men to know in order to do, but through the magic of a

kindred nature, he brought them spontaneously, unconsciously to love and to do, and so they came to know:—the divine method, the very reverse of ours.

We know by nature, by personal experience what filial affection is. We all know what it is to love and venerate a parent. "Because ye are sons," says Paul, "God hath sent forth the spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Father!" Such is the instinctive, spontaneous cry of the spirit of Christ. Thus, what we call and treat as a great formal doctrine, the idea of the Paternal Providence, flows right out of the soul. Observe the course of the Apostle's thought: "Wherefore," he continues, "ye are no more servants, but sons, and if sons, then heirs of God," inheritors of his holiness and peace "through Christ." "After that ye have thus learned to know God, how is it," he asks, "that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and times and years; I am afraid for you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain." This is a wonderful passage, wonderful to be written by a man whose whole being had been compressed and distorted from head to foot by the ligatures of a ceremonial religion, by being thrust from his very birth into a stiff, unyielding mechanism of forms. What extraordinary vitality he must have

had to survive it, and not only to survive it, but to take so heartily as he did to the spiritual freedom wherewith Jesus made men free! In sympathy with Christ, he was at once and completely disenthralled.

Let the spirit of the Son be breathed into us, and the eye of the new-born child does not more instinctively turn to the light, than we cry, Father! Thus a filial affection takes possession of us and becomes the ruling influence. Life in all its conditions is then a filial office; and we live and work and suffer as children dwelling evermore in the immediate presence of a parent. Our service is no longer formal. Indeed we are servants no more. Our work whatever it may be is not a task. The hardest duty is not a work to which we are driven by the lash of authority or the unloving force of Law. We do not measure out our work, observing days and months, stinting it to a formal routine; but we are here as children loving and dear, trusting always because we needs must, that all is well and cannot be otherwise.

I am persuaded that it was this and mainly this, the genial, sympathetic life which Christianity is, that rendered it such a novel thing among men. This, which was to the heart what air is to the lungs, mingling itself with the inmost life of men, making itself one with our common natural affections and inspiring them with a new vigor, was the irresistible

attraction that drew such multitudes to it through fire and blood. Everywhere Religion was an artificial and glittering formality,—temples and statues and processions and holidays. Nothing deeper than a childish love of show and of sight-seeing was appealed to. No doubt many in every community saw through it all, but had only a barren intellectual apprehension of anything better. All was outside and empty. In the midst of all this externality there came breathing in the world a new spirit, to which when it once found entrance into the heart, life became a sphere of affection, and men were moved to forsake evil and do good, not as servants trembling at the severe mandate of power, cowering under the lash, and so driven only to a measured service, but as sons and daughters of the Highest. Is it a wonder that a spirit so natural and so affectionate, appealing to our human nature through the sonship of Jesus, should have proved so winning that men, women and children cherished it as a thing sweeter than honey or the honey-comb?

Christianity, as it is a filial spirit, is of course a spirit of faith, of trust, and if of trust, then of hope. It is a glorious expectation. It lifts the veils of time and sense, and though we can descry nothing distinctly beyond, it is not the darkness that limits our vision but the light. There dwells of necessity in

the heart which breathes this spirit a trust too deep to admit of any anxious questionings, and which the darkness that gathers round the understanding cannot disturb.

Thus it was that Christianity came into the world, a new humanizing power breathing into human hearts—a spirit, in which, like the earth under the influences of the skies, all the hidden tenderness of our nature began to bloom. This is the great distinction of the Religion of the New Testament and of the primitive age of Christianity before it had obtained political power, when it lived in the abodes of the poor, when it was hidden in the Roman Catacombs, and the blood of its friends was lapped up by flames or shed by wild beasts for the amusement of a brutal populace. The Roman Catacombs,—those burial places of the early martyrs and of a great multitude of the first Christians,—what affecting evidence do they furnish of the tenderness of the primitive Religion of Christendom! We see there how the stern, war-like character of the ancient Romans was softened and made gentle by the affectionate spirit which God sent into their hearts through his Son. On those old tombs, there appear none of the symbols of the Church, nor any allusions to the theologies into which the Gospel has since been converted. The epitaphs are but breathings of

tenderness and peace and hope, as, "Sophronia, dulcis Sophronia, vivis in Deo." "Sophronia, sweet Sophronia, thou livest in God." What a fragrance of love and sanctity breathes from that dust! What written creed, what labored folios of theology could give us such an idea of Christianity as steals into our hearts as we visit in imagination those silent galleries of the early Christian dead. To learn what the Religion of Jesus is, shall we go to the library of the Vatican? Shall we not linger rather in the corridor of the Papal Palace, filled with the touching memorials of those who departed in trust and love and hope, amidst smoke and fire and blood, and the savage roar of Heathen mobs?

One word more, my friends. The blessed spirit of love and trust which was breathed so abundantly into human hearts through the Holy Child Jesus, did not cease its gracious ministry with his life. He did not pour it into any theological formula, whereby it should be preserved and transmitted from age to age. But in the most solemn and emphatic manner he summoned the weakest of his brethren, to stand in his place and in his stead to awaken and receive that reverential spirit, which recognizes the Father through the holy tenderness of human affections. The least of his brethren, the outcast, the fugitive

and the slave,—these are to us at this hour, the mighty Apostles of the spirit of Christ, mighty in their utter weakness, to touch our hearts and open them to that spirit. There they are kneeling to us, under their burthens, in their agony and in their chains, and in the sound of their wailing, I hear the voice of the Divine Son, rising clear and angelic above the wild fierce uproar of human passions and parties, and we are adjured to listen to it and to fly to the defence of the weak against the mighty, not merely that the wronged may be righted, but for the dear sake of Christ. As God is my witness, I cannot see otherwise than so the great struggle which now convulses the land and threatens to shake everything out of its place. It is another coming of the Lord Jesus, another mighty breathing of the spirit of the divine Son and Brother into human hearts. To many it seems the coming only of evil, of disunion and civil strife, not the breath of the God of Love, but the rising storm of fierce and bloody-minded passions, a causeless and fanatical agitation. But, brothers, I venture to affirm, that, never since the world began, has such an excitement of human passions, good and evil, arisen more manifestly against the will of man. With scarcely a solitary exception, we have all struggled to keep away from it and to repress it in ourselves and in others. But it has

been of no avail. The storm has come up against the wind, and every effort to allay it has only been made instrumental in the Providence of Heaven, in giving it new power. I cannot but recognize in it the hand of the Almighty and the discipline of his Grace. The very same spirit that once walked in Galilee in the person of Jesus, now pleads with us in the persons of millions of the down-trodden, his brothers and sisters, and ours; and as then, so now, men shrink from the fiery trial to which our humanity is put. We long for quiet. We would fain persuade ourselves that there can be no place for Religion, amidst so much uproar and bitter strife. We are ready to pray for dove's wings that we may fly away and be at rest. But remember, brethren, I charge you, remember, the grandest revelation that we know of the Peace of God, of the Peace that passes all understanding to conceive and all theology to produce, was made in times of great public excitement. Then, then it was, in fire and blood and smoke, amidst the roar of mobs, that the Holy Dove descended and nestled as never before in human hearts, and men, who were execrated as incendiaries, who were charged with turning the world upside down,—they had profound peace and joy in believing, in trusting,—in the filial trust, which God breathed into them through His Son.

O thou blessed Father of us all, breathe that same spirit into us and let us be thy sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, one of another and of all !

